



Daily Bible Reading Notes for Philippians With 8 Studies for Small Groups

St. John's Anglican Church Highton

Term 2, 2022

Schedule

Term 2 – Philippians: where true joy is found! (Epistle) (8)				
1 May	Philippians 1:1-11	JOY in the work God carries out	Will O Will O Chris L	1 Samuel 5:1-12
8 May (Mothers' Day)	Philippians 1:12-26	JOY in the priorities God sets	Josh S Josh S Will O	1 Samuel 6:1-12
15 May (Ascension – technically Thurs May 13)	Philippians 1:27-2:4	JOY in the unity God brings	Will O Will O Chris L	1 Samuel 6:13-7:2a
22 May (WhitSunday/ Pentecost)	Philippians 2:5-18	JOY in the mindset Christ had	Will O Will O Josh S	1 Samuel 7:2b-9
29 May (Trinity Sun)	Philippians 2:19-30	JOY in the Christlikeness God shapes (in others)	Will O Will O Chris L	1 Samuel 7:10-17
5 June	Philippians 3:1-21	JOY in the grace God gives	Josh S Josh S Chris L	1 Samuel 8:1-22
12 June	Philippians 4:1-9	JOY in the peace God provides	Will O Will O ??	1 Samuel 9:1-10
19 June	Philippians 4:10-23	JOY in the contentment God secures	Chris L Chris L Josh S	1 Samuel 9:11-27

Making the most of these notes

There was a time when Christian people would not have dreamt of going a day without reading their Bible and saying their prayers. Even apart from any good work performed or service rendered, a daily devotion was considered to be the most vital activity of everyday life. For this reason, some gave it absolute pride of place. (My grandmother would not even eat her breakfast until she had attentively engaged with God!)

Tales of this sort of regimen often sound a little peculiar (even legalistic!) in the modern ear. And while we would be very slow indeed to criticise them for such a practice – the truth is we are even slower to imitate them!

The contemporary Christian's devotional life tends to be a very different matter and conducted accordingly. While we may readily acknowledge this sad situation and lament it as our loss, we very often feel unable to do anything about it. We consider the problem to have arisen from a lack of time – a crisis which only we moderns suffer from. Now there is of course some truth to this, although it is also true that we have lost far more than just time.

1. We have lost 'discipline', particularly self-discipline. We have no love of routine. We still of course live with some discipline (life would be unliveable without it!), but we always feel ourselves to have enough – indeed, enough to resent it. For this reason, we are invariably unwilling to impose any more upon ourselves. We see discipline as the stifler of spontaneity, the breeding ground of duty – & unlike our pre-modern forebears, we can find no delight in duty.
2. We have also lost the art of 'meditation'. This is particularly true of the contemporary evangelical scene. We look down on Charismatics who can sing a song through more than twice. If we have to sing the same words more than about three times, it is almost as if they instantly lose their meaning. We don't seem to be able to make meaning last in our hearts & minds more than about 30 seconds. We lack the capacity to ruminate & ponder & reflect – to break something down according to its component parts, to assess it in terms of its inner dynamics & logic, to locate it in relation to other truths, ideas & related concepts, to compare it with the similar, to contrast it with the opposite, to apply it to our own thinking, attitudes and behaviour, to turn it into prayer & praise & thanks.
3. Finally, we have lost 'direction'. While once we had a prayer book and lectionary chocked full of programs to follow and material to digest, our movement away from fixed liturgical patterns has left us to our own devices. Modern devotional material tends to focus us hopelessly inward on ourselves & leaves us without examples & models to learn from & emulate. Now many of us feel a bit stuck with what to do & how to do it.

These notes have been designed to help the modern Christian in their devotional life. The joy of hearing God address us in the Bible is still the key to a healthy devotional life. And so these notes are simply that – notes to assist in daily Bible reading. Particularly, they aim to help you to be disciplined, meditative & directed.

What follows then are a series of notes with questions, thoughts for reflection, points to ponder, suggestions for prayer, and the like. Please allow about 10 minutes a day to get through this material. You will note that each week is only broken up into 5 days – that is because it is presumed that for the most part our Bible Reading & Prayer has been incorporated into our regular weekday routine.

At the end of each section are a few bigger questions as well as a suggested Starter that seek to open up fruitful lines of inquiry for discussion in a small group setting. In each case, you may find you have to do some extra work, searching back through the passage for material related to this theme, setting it in relation to other passages of Scripture, considering the alternatives, applying it to your own situation, converting it into prayer & praise.

Bonne lecture! Happy reading!

Recommended Reading

Philippians (Tyndale) – Ralph P. Martin (1959)

basic

Paul's Letter to the Philippians (NICNT) – Gordon D. Fee (1995)

intermediate

The Epistle to the Philippians (NIGTC) – Peter T. O'Brien (1991)

advanced

Day One – Read Philippians 1:1-11 – a starting note

Think –

- 1) How would you describe the apostle Paul's tone as he starts his letter to the Philippians?
What does he wish them (v.2)?
What does he do (vv.3ff)?
How does he feel (vv.7ff)?
What is his prayer (vv.9ff)?

- 2) 'Tone' is something most people are very conscious of today. How do you think most people would describe the 'tone' of Christians and of Christianity today? Or of Pauline Christianity?

- 3) And how would you hope they might describe the 'tone' of your faith in Christ and Christian experience? How would you describe it?

- 4) What is the opposite of well-wishing?
Attacking? Denouncing? Criticising? Disparaging? Censuring?
What is the opposite of thankful?
Grumbling? Complaining? Presumptuous? Entitled? Resentful?
What is the opposite of joyful?
Gloomy? Dutiful? Feisty? Suspicious? Cynical? Judgmental?
What is the opposite of prayerful?
Fretful? Disengaged / disillusioned? Political / activist? Self-sufficient? Despairing?

Pray – that the tone of our Christian piety might properly reflect the wonder of the God who saves us.

Day Two – Read Philippians 1:1-2 – Philippian greetings

Think –

- 1) How does the apostle Paul (& Timothy) address the Philippians? (verse 1)
What is the effect of the "all" (v.1)?

What is the effect of relegating “at Philippi” and fronting “in Christ Jesus” (v.1)?
Why might “together with the overseers and deacons” be tacked on the end?

- 2) In today’s world identity is about as important as ‘tone’ (see above). How does this opening address contribute to our (& their) understanding of their identity?
- 3) What does Paul wish the Philippians? (verse 2)
What would he mean by ‘grace’?
What might he mean by ‘peace’?
And what happens to these two commodities when they are detached from “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”?
- 4) What would you expect to be the marks and signs of someone who “has peace with God; and stands in (his) grace” see, Romans 5:12)?

Pray – that we might see ourselves in the light of Christ and how he sees us and how he relates to us.

Day Three – Read Philippians 1:3-6 – with joy!

Think –

- 1) The apostle Paul: i) thanks God for the Philippians; ii) remembers the Philippians; and iii) prays for the Philippians, “with joy” (v.4)!
What do you think ‘joy’ brings to these activities?
And what effect do you think the absence of joy stands to have on these same activities?
- 2) How does he explain the reason(s) for his joy?
 - a. What do you think he has in mind when he refers to “their partnership”? And how is it described? What aspect in particular does he single out?
 - b. And what is the nature of “his confidence”? And how do you think this is related to their partnership?
- 3) Take a moment to reflect on and to describe:
 - a. Your joy?
 - b. Your partnership in the gospel?
 - c. Your confidence in God?

Pray – that God might fill our hearts with the joy that comes from faith in Christ and partnership in the gospel.

Day Four – Read Philippians 1:7-8 – get in touch with your feelings

Think –

- 1) How does the apostle Paul feel about the Philippians?

- 2) What does it mean to “hold someone in your heart” (v.7)? (cf., 2 Corinthians 7:2 & 1 Thessalonians 2:17).
 - a. And why does Paul have them in his heart?

- 3) How does all this affection work for Paul?
 - a. How does he long for them with the affection of Christ Jesus?
 - b. Whose affection is it?
 - c. How do you make sense of the experience Paul is describing here?

- 4) And how does his experience compare to yours?
 - a. Who do you hold in your heart?
 - b. Why? How did they get to be there?
 - c. How would you say your experience is similar / comparable to Paul’s?
 - d. How would you say it is different? Why?

Pray – that the Lord might knit us together with a sincere brotherly love from the heart, through our fellowship together.

Day Five – Read Philippians 1:9-11 – this is one fantastic prayer

Think –

- 1) What is Paul’s prayer?
 - a. What might he mean for their “love to abound more and more” (v.9)?
What might this involve / look like / issue in?

b. How does love blossom and grow?

What is the role of “knowledge and depth of insight” (v.9)?

What does this bring? How does it help?

c. Why would discernment be so significant to love?

Isn't that kind of cold calculating critical faculty the opposite of love (cf., Romans 10:2)

2) Time for self-assessment: how is your love going? Growing? If you could do anything to fertilise it, what would you turn to? Why?

Pray – that we abound more and more in love, and knowing God's will that we might bear fruit in our lives to his glory!

Small Group Study Questions

1) The theme of **joy** is dominant in this letter. It will just keep coming up, again and again. From this opening section, what do we learn about Paul's experience of joy? How does he describe it? What is it based in? Where does it come from? What does it issue in? What are its key activities? What produces joy? And what does joy produce?

And what about the opposite? What happens if joy is lacking? What does this do to us personally? To our relationships with one another? To our activities, duties and tasks?

2) In this introductory section, we discover something of the **identity** of those to whom Paul wrote. How does Paul address these Philippian Christians?? If you had to produce an identikit from just what we learn about the Philippians in this opening section, how do you picture them? How would you describe them? What things does Paul highlight about their identity? And what does he treasure most about them?

How does your status 'in Christ Jesus' effect the way you think about yourself? And in relation to other things about you? And how does it effect the way you relate to others? Especially to those who share that status with you?

3) On display here is something of the warmth of Christian **fellowship** when it works well, as it should. What are some of the key ingredients listed here? How is it expressed here? What feelings does it foster? What concerns? How are these things expressed? What does 'partnership' involve? What do we share in? And how do we share in this together?

What can we do to cultivate fellowship? And what can we do to neglect / undermine it?

4) From this window into the apostle Paul's **prayer** life, what do we have to learn? How does he pray? What accompanies his prayers? Who does he pray for? And what does he actually pray for?

How happy are you with your prayer-life? What do you think stands to improve it? Where do you struggle the most? What could help you to change this and improve things?

Day One – Read Philippians 1:12-14 – personal priorities

Think –

- 1) What do we learn here about the apostle Paul's experience of imprisonment?
 - a. How does he rate it? How does he describe its impact?

 - b. What kind of details would you expect to hear from someone imprisoned?

- 2) Why do we tend to rate and evaluate all things primarily in terms of their impact upon us personally?

And why might we not tend to rate and evaluate all things according to their impact upon the 'advancement of the gospel' (v.17)?

What does this say about us? And how can we make changes on this front?

- 3) How would you account for and explain the reaction described in verse 14?

What impact would you expect his imprisonment to have on fellow-believers? How do you suspect it would impact you if Christian leaders started to be arrested and imprisoned these days?

What impact has Paul's imprisonment had on others?

Pray – that the Lord might continue to shift our priorities away from ourselves and our interests and redirect them to the gospel and its progress.

Day Two – Read Philippians 1:15-18a – prison party

Think –

- 1) How is that two different groups can respond in the same way?
 - a. What motivates one group (vv.15 & 17)?

 - b. And what motivates the other group (v.16)?

2) How would you expect the apostle Paul to evaluate these two 'same, same, but different' responses (v.18a)?

How does he? What's the surprise here?

Again, what does this reveal about the apostle Paul & his priorities?

3) How would you assess your priorities? Are there any which so dominate how you regard and evaluate other things? Are there any which attract a similar fierce determination as we see here in Paul's priority on the gospel?

Pray – that we might long to see the gospel make progress and rejoice whenever and wherever and however we see that happen.

Day Three – Read Philippians 1:18b-20 – personal dilemma

Think –

1) Here we see the apostle Paul facing something of a personal dilemma – what exactly are his prospects? What are the options he can envisage?

2) And what gives him grounds for hope and confidence? (verse 19)

a. What does this say about Paul's view of 'prayer'? (v.19)

b. What does he mean by "God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ"? (v.19)

3) Sometimes people either fear the worst OR they presume the best – but either way, the result is that they fail to pray. Are there things that you don't bother praying for because you have given up all hope that they might happen? And/or are there things that you don't bother praying for because you are super confident that they will just happen?

How would you think to help someone who might be stuck at either end of that spectrum??

4) We hear the apostle wrestle with 'shame' and 'courage' here (verse 20). Does this sound familiar to you?

a. In what context / setting are you most likely to be / feel ashamed of Christ or the gospel?

b. In what context / setting are you most likely to need OR to lack courage??

5) The apostle Paul uses a slightly unusual turn of phrase here – that Christ might be “exalted in my body” whether by life or by death (v.20). What do you understand this to mean?

a. How might this happen in life? (And how not?)

b. How might it happen in death? (And how not?)

c. What is one particular expression this reality that is personally challenging and applicable to you?

Pray – that we might have sufficient confidence in our Saviour and Lord for him to completely rule our whole person.

Day Four – Read Philippians 1:21-24 – to live or not to live?

Think –

1) Paul seems to be weighing his options at this point. What are his prospects?

2) How does he compare them? What are the pros and the cons?

3) What is his fundamental controlling attitude in either and both?

4) A dilemma for us usually involves a scenario in which we are choosing between going God’s way OR going our own.

Can you remember a time and situation when you’ve been faced with a dilemma of which way to go – in which God stands to be glorified either way?

- a. How did this make you feel? Did you get stuck as to what and how to decide?
- b. How did you decide / resolve this?
- c. And how did it work / play out for you?

Pray – that we might resolve always to do the very best that we can for the Lord and for others.

Day Five – Read Philippians 1:25-26 – a confident conclusion

Think –

- 1) Here we find the apostle Paul settling on his confident conclusion and expectation for how things will play out. At least, what is he persuaded will be best?
- 2) From what he says and how he argues, how do you think he reached this conclusion?
 - a. There is a similarity between the “advance” of verse 12 and the “progress” of verse 25. How do you relate these twin concerns and priorities?
- 3) And what would you expect that he did on the basis of this conviction?
- 4) How do you tend to handle these sorts of dilemmas?
 - a. How do you arrive at a place of conviction? And what do you tend to do on the basis of that conviction?
 - b. What if it then doesn’t work out as you had expected? How do you protect yourself from disappointment and disillusionment?
 - c. And what about if you never arrive at a place of confidence and conviction? How do you handle that? What do you tend to do in that situation?

Pray – that the Lord might give to us wisdom from above and work in us conviction by his Spirit that we might in all things live for him.

Small Group Study Questions

1) This little section provides a significant insight not simply into Paul's options, but more importantly into his **priorities**. Which priorities of Paul's are most on display?

What shows them to be 'priorities'?

How does the prospect of life and death help to clarify these things?

What would you count to be some of your top priorities? And what are some lesser ones?

How do you weigh the value of your priorities?

How do you handle competing priorities?

Do you have any priorities that are for you 'at all cost' priorities? What is the impact of these? On you? On others?

2) It's too much to call this a moment of crisis. But there is uncertainty. And we do find Paul at something of a **crossroads**, weighing up his options.

What is his personal situation here, as best as you can understand it?

How does he view it? And how does he process it, weigh it up personally?

How does his approach compare with yours? How do you handle times of uncertainty?

Delicate options? Moments at crossroads in life?

What tends to help you in these situations? And how do they help?

Where do you tend to turn?

What things / factors tend to complicate it for you?

How are you most likely to resolve these things?

3) Paul enunciates his **overriding attitude / approach** – both to life and to death – in one really memorable little aphorism: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain". Take a moment to reflect on this statement. What does he mean? How do you understand this? At what point is it most radical?

To what extent could echo these words? Which end of this equation feels the bigger challenge? How much is your faith in Christ a matter of life and death? Where might such a faith show itself different from one that is just about life now?

4) By the end of this section, Paul arrives at a point of **conviction**. But it is an interesting journey there. The matter is not settled by a word from the Lord. The options seem reasonable, even good – either way!

What is Paul weighing up? What conclusion does he arrive at? How does he get there? What makes it easier for him? What complicates it for him?

How do you tend to handle these things?

Are you naturally decisive OR more indecisive?

How do you wrestle with your prospects and your options? And how do you weigh them?

And ultimately how do you resolve them?

And even when you do, with what confidence do you hold to them? Embark upon them?

And why?